

# Opinion: Cooperation needed to get Tahoe moving

By Tom Wendell

Why does it take a calamity like a natural or human caused disaster to bring out the best in human nature?

The question somewhat answers itself – because that's human nature. We as a species appear to be hard wired to put aside concerns for our own safety and well being during disasters. Witness the brave Japanese workers at a radiation leaking power plant, selfless Good Samaritan rescuers working to free earthquake victims from under a collapsed freeway or our own response to the Angora Fire.



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Scenes like these have been unfolding all over the world with increasing frequency, yet collectively we seem unwilling to apply these altruistic sensibilities to avoid a slow motion disaster in the making. Acknowledging that biochemical responses like adrenalin affect our behavior in emergency situations, it still baffles me why we don't marshal our considerable cerebral capabilities to act decisively on commonly recognized issues that are slowly but inexorably deteriorating into emergencies. Much like the fable of the frog who will jump to safety if placed in boiling water but will slowly succumb in water that is gradually heated to a boil, we as a community are metaphorically sitting in water

that has been gradually heating for decades and is about to reach the boiling point.

Instead of responding to deteriorating economic and environmental conditions (which eventually affect everyone) with a major outpouring of community spirit and cooperation, we often act like purely instinct driven squirrels – fighting over a dwindling supply of acorns whilst the oak trees that produce them are slowly dying out because no acorns are left to propagate the species. While some squirrels would undoubtedly survive longer, in the end they will all have to find a new home or perish unless they work cooperatively to reinvest acorns for their common good. In the squirrel metaphor, it's easy to identify the common good – the continued growth of oak trees.

For complex human issues the trick of course is to come to consensus as to what constitutes common good.

There are scores of examples of this conundrum throughout the Tahoe region, never mind over the entire globe. The question is: What are we going to do about it? We could start by exhibiting the model community concept by working together cooperatively as a community instead of like gangs of squirrels squabbling over a diminishing supply of acorns. While each situation has its own unique challenges, one factor that they all have in common is a need for us to roll up our sleeves, work together cooperatively, be ready to identify and compromise on non-essential preferences/desires to achieve a common goal: The restoration and sustentation of our natural and built environment and our economy.

As I see it, the overarching goal is to ensure that we protect and maintain a physical and social environment that will provide a good quality of life for all and attract the kind of low-impact tourism that will sustain and enhance all aspects of our physical and social environment. This is a simple closed-loop model: Nurture your physical and social

environment and it will sustain you. If we can agree that this is the goal, then back casting from there, we can collectively draw a road map to a brighter future.

It's my hope that this missive will attract some ideas and inspire us as a community and a group of communities to tackle critical issues and work together to achieve this goal. What do you see as major issues that pose a threat to social, economic and environmental sustainability? Let's hear them and start the process of finding our own solutions as a community.

On April 29 there was a well-attended meeting about proposed changes and up-grades to Lake Tahoe Boulevard from Viking Way to Clear Creek Road. The majority of those in attendance appeared to be residents of neighborhoods who use this stretch of mostly four-lane highway to commute between their homes and South Lake Tahoe. Most (but not all speakers) were opposed to reducing the up to 55 mph stretch to two lanes and reducing speed limits in order to more safely accommodate bicycle traffic and better manage runoff. Reasons given ranged from legal challenges, snow removal and emergency response concerns to a perceived drop in home values.

The snow removal and emergency concerns were quickly quashed by county personnel and active emergency responders; some who live in the affected neighborhoods. The home value argument is a total red herring as home values historically increase whenever quality-of-life improvements like increased walkability and bikeability are incorporated into community plans. The issue of the legality of changing the road due to stipulations in the deed that gave the road to the county will have to be addressed but if all four lanes remain and the only substantial change is which type of vehicles are allowed to use which lane, that might render the legal issue moot.

*Tom Wendell is a member of South Lake Tahoe's Sustainability Commission.*